

Trained and Ready Airmen —

Fundamental to CE mission success

An interview with CMSgt Michael F. Doris, Chief of Enlisted Matters, Office of The Civil Engineer, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Pentagon

The CE: From your travels around the major commands, how do you perceive morale to be among the troops?

Chief Doris: The morale of our civil engineers is generally good. I've found that our folks demonstrate their "Can do, Will do" attitudes daily.

There are valid concerns out there, the major ones being pay and entitlements; funding, in terms of having the resources available to do a job properly; and quality of life. There are a lot of variables involved, but we are actively working these at all levels of the Air Force.

For those out there with issues, we need to listen to and determine the validity of their concerns. If it's a matter that can be addressed at local levels, they should give their leadership a chance to work it; if it's an issue that needs to be addressed at higher levels, they should elevate it up their chain of command for the right people to work.

Unfortunately, there are those whom I call the "disgruntled employees." They have issues with everything and don't recognize when it's time to move on. We experienced this several years ago with reorganizing our squadrons and multi-skilling our specialties. There were many who resisted change, but fortunately we have overcome most of those issues and moved on to become productive in our restructured organizations and specialties.

The CE: According to the Air Force Personnel Center, over half of the enlisted force will be eligible to make a reenlistment decision between fiscal years 2001 and 2004, and with a robust economy the potential exists for large numbers to migrate to the private sector. How do CE's enlisted retention percentages compare to the Air Force's as a whole?

Chief Doris: Most of our AFSCs [Air Force Specialty Codes] are close to the Air Force averages. We do have a few that are dangerously low, but we have many folks working to make them better.

Fortunately, retention is being addressed at every level of Air Force senior leadership, up through the Chief of Staff. General [Michael E.] Ryan directed a Retention Summit in January 2000 that brought together experts on all types of personnel and compensation matters. As a result, there were a significant number of recommendations and initiatives developed to attack our retention challenges. Many of these are being implemented today, while others have been programmed over several years, to improve overall retention rates.

One of those initiatives establishes Career Advisor positions back at our wings. We should capitalize on this by establishing a CE liaison to the Career Advisor. Perhaps appointing a sharp, energetic, technical or master sergeant from within the CE organization as an additional duty, to relate to our folks specifically, might prove beneficial in assisting our personnel with their re-enlistment decisions and aiding our declining retention rates.

On a more immediate note, each of our CE AFSCs receives a first term, zone A, reenlistment bonus and 10 of our specialties receive a zone B bonus. We've also instituted a zone C bonus for four CE career fields. During the last selective reenlistment bonus review in January of this year, we requested increases to the bonus for 11 of the 13 CE specialties. Unfortunately, those increases did not receive funding so we'll re-evaluate our career fields this summer and try again, if needed.

We are also working to increase quality of life in our workplaces. So, we're addressing the retention issue from several different avenues.

The CE: What do you think keeps the young enlisted troops motivated to stay in CE, despite the current climate of privatization initiatives and base closures?

Chief Doris: Some of it is job satisfaction, learning the trades and being involved in every aspect of what goes on at an installation. We're probably the only functional area that impacts every single person at an installation on a daily basis. There aren't many others that can say that, and some of our folks recognize this.

I'd be naïve if I didn't say money has something to do with it — we're paying people to come in the Air Force and paying people to stay in the Air Force. But then there's the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with learning a skill, learning a trade, going to work and getting something done so they can stand back and point to others and say, "I did that," and be proud.

We will always have a job for Air Force blue-suit civil engineers, in spite of competitive sourcing and privatization, drawdowns, base closures, or whatever adverse actions people perceive are happening to our community. We're not giving a pink slip to any blue suit military civil engineer, and we're doing our very best to take care of our civilian work force at those locations that are affected.

The CE: In your opinion, how healthy are CE training programs?

Chief Doris: If I were a doctor, I would have to say that our training programs are in stable, but guarded, condition. Our squadron leadership supports training extremely well. The supervisors just need to capitalize on that support and execute their programs. At higher levels, there is considerable support for training, however quite often there is not funding.

We've just finished a complete round of Utilization and Training Workshops where we addressed training requirements for every civil engineer AFS. The review was led by career field managers at the Air Force Civil Engineer Support Agency with assistance from subject matter experts representing the major commands, plus the training development staff from our CE schools. It took about two years to complete. The CE schoolhouses and AFCESA's training division are now implementing the results. This will take some time because we can't get the resources overnight. For everything to come to fruition, we've got to source the instructor positions, the equipment items, and the student man-years to correctly size the courses and implement the curriculum.

Individually, our units are struggling to meet training requirements because of our operations tempo. Many folks aren't finding the time necessary to accomplish skills and contingency training requirements because they're working their backsides off maintaining our bases and meeting our AEF [Aerospace Expeditionary Force] deployment taskings, while being undermanned themselves. I attribute this to one of our Air Force core values, one that CE displayed long before the Air Force put it on a poster — Service Before Self. While other organizations on base may "close for training," CE rarely closes for anything.

The other thing I've discovered is there are those who don't know what all the training requirements are, or where they can find out. For example, some still don't know that AFQTPs [Air Force Qualification Training Packages] are *mandatory* for upgrade and often miss that essential training.

It's easy to find the requirements for every CE specialty because they are listed in the CFETPs [Career Field Education and Training Plans] and posted on the AFCESA web site. If our folks haven't visited that site, they're missing a great tool to help them do their jobs.

The CE: How does today's civil engineer training compare to that of 10 years ago, prior to Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM?

Chief Doris: We've come a long way since DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Those who've been around since then can see a little of how things today are better and brighter.

When we first entered the Gulf War, a lot of people in CE had never seen or touched bare base equipment. We've since made major strides in exposing them to their wartime duties and equipment. A special thanks goes to the training programs at the CE schoolhouses, Silver Flag and the 49th Materiel Maintenance Group's mobile training teams for making this happen. We've also revised our home station training programs over the past decade. Today they are more focused and targeted toward specific skills for certain AFSCs. Our Silver Flag eligibility criteria reflects this fact by having those in critical UTC [unit type code] positions attend training.

The one thing we can do better, in my opinion, is capitalize on all the lessons learned from DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. We've not always had the resources to implement new programs supporting those lessons in the past. Our future initiatives should follow our CE Core Competencies and be integrated within our CE

Strategic Plan. All of our personnel should be familiar with the direction we're moving toward for 2025 so we aren't "relearning" those lessons. Our people need to know that there's a plan and we're going to do our best to follow it.

The CE: Utilities privatization initiatives could result in systems and equipment not being available for training. In that case, what alternatives are available to commanders to ensure their personnel can meet training requirements?

Chief Doris: First of all, utilities privatization will *not* result in lost opportunities for training our folks unless we let it. There are several different avenues that can be explored to meet training requirements at an installation when a system or piece of equipment is not available. We're in the process of updating the utilities privatization RFP [request for proposal] template that's been developed by AFCESA for use by the bases. This will allow for contracting some of the training in conjunction with the privatization measure.

Specialty training locations run by Air Force Reserve Command and regional training sites run by the Air National Guard are available to provide some of this type of much-needed training. And there are other avenues to pursue as well, including local vocational or technical colleges and nearby military installations.

There is a *Commander's Procedural Guide* for obtaining training in support of utilities privatization that's been developed by AFCESA's training division and posted on the AFCESA web site. It offers great guidance on how commanders can execute their programs in light of the privatization occurring at many of our bases. The key is to continually place emphasis on training.

The CE: Has meeting EAF obligations presented CE units with training challenges as well?

Chief Doris: The EAF [Expeditionary Aerospace Force] obligations and training requirements haven't changed. But we now have a specific reason for executing training programs in a timely fashion. Many of the installations could not execute, for whatever reason, some of their training at home station. In order to meet our EAF obligations, those training requirements must be sought out or accomplished sooner rather than later at other locations. We do a pretty good job of meeting our EAF obligations. At last count, about 90 percent of CE is obligated to the EAF. I would wager that's more than many other functional areas. I think we're also very effective at posturing and preparing our folks to meet our training requirements.

As I travel, I make it a point to speak with our enlisted personnel about their deployments and EAF commitments. Most of our personnel know what AEF "bucket" they're in and that's a big plus for the predictability and stability part of the concept.

All indications from the leadership at deployed locations reflect positive results; so our folks are also meeting the mission requirements. Additionally, those who remain behind at home station face challenges and high ops tempo as well, so it's important we remember both sides of the EAF equation.

The CE: How should CE training be postured over the next five years? What types of changes do you foresee?

Chief Doris: A lot depends on influences outside our control, but in the next five years, CE training should be postured to capitalize on technology. We should see more use of the Internet, DVDs, electronic testing measures, and things of that nature. When the Air Force portal comes online we'll be better able to do this. Another consideration in implementing this is whether the programs that AFCESA and the Air Staff work are fully funded, including base-level funding.

For example, if we provide a DVD for training, will the unit have a DVD-capable computer? When we start talking about electronic testing in our career development courses or promotion testing, do the base and unit have the hardware to support that? I suspect that is funding the units and wings don't currently have to make this happen.

If I had a crystal ball, where would I see us going? This probably won't happen in the next five years, but eventually training will be accomplished electronically from any location. If we have people who are in training, or require training, when they deploy they will still be able to conduct their training from the middle of nowhere, electronically. And at home station, we will have the availability to provide training, or receive training, from

locations in our workplace and where we reside, such as learning resource centers in the dormitories. We're getting there, but it's a slow process.

The CE: What other training issues are you currently working?

Chief Doris: The Chief of Staff has directed an initiative called "Developing Aerospace Leaders." There's a DAL office in the Pentagon, working for the Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, which we have a civil engineer officer assigned to. The DAL program started with looking at how we develop our officer corps. They've now expanded to the enlisted force, and they've hired a chief master sergeant to shepherd that effort. We in CE, through our CE Chiefs' Council, are the first support function actively involved in the DAL.

One of the things we're looking at is how we groom and grow our enlisted leadership to support our mission and requirements. We're looking all the way down to the staff sergeant level to determine what training and specific development a person needs to eventually become a chief master sergeant in CE.

We're also looking at how we employ our people, so that they will have the opportunity to become chiefs. As we become narrower at the top of the pyramid — master sergeant, senior master sergeant and ultimately chief master sergeant — we also narrow the types of positions in our objective CE squadrons that folks can aspire to fill. So if one wanted to become the chief of heavy repair, for example, there's only a select group of AFSCs that theoretically grow into that position. The same is true for the chief of infrastructure or other superintendent-level positions. So we're looking at opportunities for opening that up a little for our most qualified personnel.

The Chiefs' Council is also working to solve the disparity in the employment of our people, specifically in the 3E5 (engineering) and 3E6 (operations management) AFSCs. We want to expand the focus of how they are employed, so that their training and skills are used to most benefit them and the Air Force.

We're also looking at are improving our processes and the mechanisms by which training is made available, and improving quality of life standards, not just at home station but also in the deployed environment. We're looking at things like our overseas rotation index. For example, how much of a burden is it on our power production career field, which historically rotates back and forth overseas quite a bit. Through these types of initiatives, we want to influence our folks that CE is a good place to stick around, a good place to stay for the long haul.

Sidebars

As chief of enlisted matters for The Air Force Civil Engineer, Chief Doris advises Maj Gen Earnest O. Robbins on matters affecting CE's enlisted and wage grade civilian work force, especially readiness, morale, retention, training and work force utilization.

Chief Doris chairs the AF Civil Engineer Chiefs' and Airmen's Councils. The councils review issues affecting the work force, communicate ideas, and develop recommendations for senior leadership consideration.